

# Shellfish help clean harbor

Island Creek oysters involved in Boston Harbor cleanup project

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150,000 Duxbury oysters were dumped into Boston Harbor on Saturday. Their purpose was not to be harvested as appetizers for some charity ball, but to help reduce pollution.

The oysters were part of the Massachusetts Oyster Project for Clean Water, run by president Andrew Jay.

Jay, a Charlestown native, said he and some friends read a book about the reintroduction of oysters to the Chesapeake Bay in Baltimore, Maryland. Although those oysters are harvested for food, he learned that oysters can help to purify the water they're in.

"In that book what became clear was ... oysters have tremendous water purifying capabilities," he said. An oyster can filter 50 gallons of water a day.

He started looking into reintroducing oysters into Boston Harbor, where the mollusk was once plentiful.

When he started calling around to local oyster farms, the folks at Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury were happy to help.

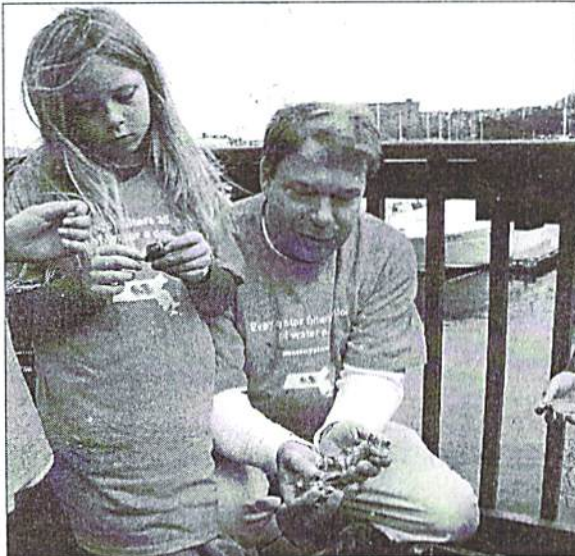
"I think it's a noble effort and I wanted to be a part of it," said Island Creek's Skip Bennett.

The oysters were seeded at the Constitution Marina at the mouth of the Charles River.

Shore Gregory and Bennett helped teach Jay and the rest of the staff at the Oyster Project about oysters. They also assisted in getting a permit for the 150,000 oysters to be planted in the river. The oysters, when they were purchased from a breeder, weighed less than a pound combined, Bennett said. When they were put in the river, they weighed over 2,000 pounds.

"Not only did they provide encouragement, they provided expertise," said Jay. "They've been fabulous."

The hope is that the oysters will help filter contaminated water coming from combined



Andrew Jay of the Massachusetts Oyster Project for Clean Water picks up a handful of Duxbury oysters before they're seeded into the Charles River.

Courtesy Photo

sewage overflow pipes, where sewage and rainwater runoff are sometimes flushed out to sea during heavy rain.

Bennett said the oysters filter out excess nitrogen in the water, which can lead to algae blooms that choke off other plant life.

Although the oysters in the Charles won't be able to be harvested for human consumption because of the pollution, Jay hopes they will become an important part of the ecosystem, encouraging other species to take root.

"There are 200 species of fish that will live in an among an oyster reef," he said.

Although there's no way to measure it, Bennett believes marine life in Duxbury has rebounded since the start of oyster farming in the bay. Projects like Jay's increase awareness of the beneficial aspects of oysters. Bennett said that when colonists first came to Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, the water was clear for 40 feet and abundant oysters filtered the entire body of water in 3 days. That process now takes over two years.

"It's nice to have some-

body making the point that it's beneficial to the environment," he said.

Using oysters to remediate pollution is something that's catching on across the country. Island Creek farmer John Brawley is working on a project in New York City.

"It's really something that's taking off," said Bennett.

Now that the bed had been seeded, the Oyster project will have to watch to see if the population survives for the next two weeks. If they make it that far, they'll have to survive the winter. The next test would be for the animals to start reproducing by next summer.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed," Jay said. "Then we'd be cooking with gas. These are very prolific creatures, and their offspring could begin to make a real difference."

If this pilot project works, there are plans to seed additional protected oyster beds in the Mystic River and the Neponset River.

"I think it's a really good pilot project to prove oysters can help clean up the environment," said Bennett. "It gets the ball rolling."